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RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 0139

RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0075

RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0109

RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0241

RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0251

RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0153

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0101

RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0136

RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0428

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0412

RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 0029

RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0405

RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1079

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SUBJECT: RECENT LIBYAN ACTIVITY IN THE CAR: A NEW CHAPTER IN AN OLD STORY

REF: 09 BANGUI 56

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The apparent dissolution of the December 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue in the Central African Republic has been precipitated by, among other events, the recent rebel activity of the FDPC, a group with strongly suspected ties to Libya (REFTEL 09 BANGUI 56). Libya's influence upon the CAR stretches back at least thirty years, waxing and waning over time, but may now be on an up tick. END SUMMARY

Background

¶12. (SBU) The Central African Republic and Libya established diplomatic relations shortly after Qadhafi came to power in 1969. Ties were reinforced by a commercial agreement between the two countries signed in October 1976. Since then, Central African heads of state have continued to reinforce the country's economic and political ties with Libya.

Political relationship

¶13. (SBU) Qadhafi's Libya was among the first Arab countries to open a diplomatic mission in the Central African Republic. Colonel Qadhafi visited CAR several time and even succeeded in converting President Bokassa to Islam for a very short time in 1976. Though Libyan involvement continued post Bokassa, it was President Ange Felix Patasse, elected in 1993, who developed the strongest political, financial, economic and military relationships with Tripoli. Libya backed Patasse in the resolution of the political and military crises that the country faced during the 1996 and 1997 mutinies as well as the May 2001 Andre Kolingba-led coup attempt. To protect Patasse's regime, Libya deployed troops and significant military equipment which were then used later to oppose Francois Bozize's rebellion of October 2002. Under strong pressure from the international community and opposition groups, the Libyans were asked to withdraw their armed forces before Bozize's successful coup in 2003, but by 2005 they would again be embroiled CAR politics: Bozize was confronted with the rebellions by the APRD, UFDR and FDPC, and was forced to request aid from Qadhafi. Together with President Bongo of Gabon, Qadhafi pushed for the signature of peace agreements between the rebel groups and the Central African Government which paved the way for the recent Inclusive Political Dialogue. Libya continues to play a crucial political

role in the Central African Republic as member of the Inclusive Political Dialogue Follow up Committee, though the dialogue teeters on the edge due to recent violence.

Military cooperation

¶ 14. (SBU) During Bokassa's rule, the Central African Republic signed a military cooperation agreement with Libya that lasted from 1976 to 1979. Though direct military to military exchanges ended with Bokassa, Libyan troops have been involved in internal CAR disputes on multiple occasions, particularly in helping protect Patasse's regime against the May 2001 failed coup by Kolingba. Additionally, the CAR Gendarmerie uses vehicles donated by the Libyan Embassy as transport to and from its correctional facility in Bangui.

Economic and financial assistance

¶ 15. (SBU) Libya is among Central African Republic's many donors, yet few can estimate the total amount or breakdown of financial assistance received from Libya. Post believes this is due to the fact that the majority of assistance is not provided through the usual cooperation channels but is instead conducted at a head of state level with few paper trails. However, Post was able to ascertain that Libya donated 5,000 tons of oil to the Central African Government in 1998 to help the country deal with sharp oil price increases on the international markets and has continued to provide emergency support of this kind on an as needed basis.

¶ 16. (SBU) The Libyan economic presence in CAR is particularly

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visible in the sectors of real estate and banking. Libya acquired several properties in Bangui during Patasse's time, among them a 300 room hotel whose proprietors contracted a Chinese company to restart the construction work in 2008. It is telling perhaps that very little paperwork exists concerning the structure or background of how the properties were purchased and who exactly owns them. The most recent and highly visible Libyan investment has been in the banking sector. Banque Sahelo-Saharienne pour l'Investissement et le Commerce (BSIC), of which Libya owns a 45 per cent share, is a regional bank created in 1999 to provide a comprehensive range of financial and banking services, including long term financing for the public and private sectors in an effort to accelerate socio-economic development of the CEN-SAD community country members. BSIC opened its Bangui branch in October of 2008.

¶ 17. (SBU) COMMENT: Post believes one of two scenarios is likely in play (or perhaps a combination of the two):

-- Regime change. Libyans in the CAR signaled to the Ambassador their disappointment with the current government, perhaps the BSIC has been targeted by corruption and abuse. Perhaps some other agreement between Qadhafi and Bozize has been breached. Outgoing Ambassador of BONUCA, Francois Fall (PROTECT SOURCE), told us this may be a driving reason for Qadhafi's renewed interest in the CAR.

-- A desire in general to weaken neighboring states and as well as a push back against Bongo's regional influence? It may be that the FDPC is being put into play to ensure that either the CARG remains weak, or that Qadhafi will have a stronger hand from which to play when a deal is in the making. Additionally, according to an Embassy source, Qadhafi was enraged by his lack of influence upon the Inclusive Political Dialogue and may be smarting at his loss of face vis a vis Bongo.

¶ 18. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.
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